DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 267 184 CE 043 694

TITLE The Causes of Stress on the Modern Secretary.
INSTITUTION Professional Secretaries International, Kansas City, MO.
PUB DATE [19 Feb 86]
NOTE 22p.; Co-sponsored by Panasonic Electronic Typewriter Division.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Statistical Data (110)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Demography; Employment Opportunities; *Job Satisfaction; National Surveys; Office Machines; *Offices (Facilities); Rural Urban Differences; *Secretaries; *Stress Variables; Technological Advancement; *Work Attitudes; *Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS *Stress (Biological)

ABSTRACT

A study examined the causes and intensity of stress in the modern secretary. Questionnaires completed by nearly 4,000 members of Professional Secretaries International throughout the country were split into a 2,000-respondent cluster from urban areas and a 2,000-respondent "nonurban" cluster that included both secretaries from and not from cities. The urban secretaries expressed only slightly greater stress than those from the nonurban cluster. Among younger secretaries, however, urban employees indicated much greater levels of stress. Those job duties that caused the greatest stress were answering the phone, redoing work executives do too hastily or erroneously, coordinating and supervising, and doing research. Lack of advancement opportunities, lack of input into decisions, lack of communication from supervisors, and insufficient pay were the job characteristics that caused the most stress. Stress associated with office machines, while generally low, increased among respondents with the rising level of technological sophistication. Two-thirds of those surveyed felt that stress has affected their health. (This report concludes with a section of representative secretary complaints and suggestions for alleviating them.) (MN)

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THE CAUSES OF STRESS ON THE MODERN SECRETARY

Based on

PROFESSIONAL SURVEY ON SECRETARIAL STRESS

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FOREWORD

Secretaries are a vital part of American business life. They keep companies and organizations running smoothly with their administrative and communication skills. They provide the valuable support that enables managers to effectively accomplish their goals.

Secretaries, however, are even more crucial to the success of our industry—office automation. They are the ones who must work with office machines day in and day out. In fact, during the average work week, many of them spend more time with typewriters, word processors or PCs than with their families during the average work week. This fact weighs heavily on Panasonic Industrial Company as we develop office automation products. Our major priority is to offer powerful, yet "user friendly," machines that make a secretary's job easier and less-stressful by maximizing their productivity while minimizing strain associated with document preparation.

Because we build our products primarily for secretaries, we have a fervent desire to gain as much knowledge as possible about their work environment, goals and concerns. By learning more, we can design machines, such as electronic typewriters, that are even more useful and convenient.

We share this quest for knowledge with Professional Secretaries International, a 40,000-member non-profit association that promotes competence in, and public recognition of, the profession. That is why we are co-sponsoring the research into secretarial stress covered in this report.

While we don't claim that the survey answers all the questions related to secretarial stress, we do believe that it will further public understanding of the issue. It is the hope of both Panasonic and Professional Secretaries International that the project will lead to further improvements in secretaries' working conditions across the country.

Frank T. Masi
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INTRODUCTION

The Professional Survey on Secretarial Stress was conducted to examine the causes of stress in the modern secretary, as well as to gauge the level of its intensity. It attempted to evaluate the impact of environmental conditions, such as job functions, overall work atmosphere, professional relationships, executive work habits and office equipment, on the problem.

The project was co-sponsored by the Electronic Typewriter Division at Panasonic Industrial Company and Professional Secretaries International (PSI). The questionnaire was developed and analyzed in conjunction with Dr. Robert F. Ostermann and Dr. Robert M. Chell, a team of industrial psychologists from Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. The T.A. Miller Company of Clifton, N.J., a market research and consulting firm specializing in health care issues, conducted the study and also participated in its development.

The questionnaire was sent to 4,000 PSI members in all regions of the country. These members were split into two separate samples to measure any potential differences in attitudes and stress levels between secretaries in "urban" and "non-urban" areas. The "urban" responses referred to in this report were compiled from a 2,000-name "cluster" sample evenly distributed among the nation's top twenty metropolitan areas, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia, among others. The "non-urban" responses came from a 2,000-name "random" sample of PSI members located outside of these areas, which, incidently, did include several cities. In all, a total of 1,000 questionnaires, 500 from each sample, were tabulated by computer and analyzed.

QUESTIONNAIRE OVERVIEW

The survey asked 18 questions, divided into five areas of emphasis: demographic identification, stress-producing activities, stress-producing job characteristics, equipment-related stress, and stress awareness.

Questions 1 through 5 profile the respondents' demographic identity, including their employing company's size and geographic location, their age, job title, salary, and the number of executives they serve.

Questions 6 and 7 were divided into two parts to determine not only the level of stress caused by certain work environmental conditions, but also the impact of frequency on stress. The questions make an important distinction in the types of conditions:

Question 6 tracks what are called "job activities," or actual responsibilities associated with a secretarial position, including typing, filing and answering the phone, among others.

Question 7 explores "job characteristics," or work environmental conditions that can't be defined as activities—such as boredom from routine, uncertainty or lack of supervisor communication. Most of the 26 characteristics queried could be attached to any one of many tasks.

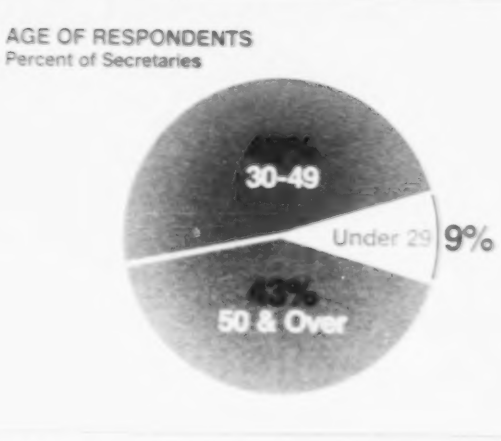
The survey covers the secretarial use patterns and impact on stress of office machinery in questions 8 through 13. Secretaries were asked what types of automated office equipment they utilize, their length of experience with each machine, and whether they must share equipment with co-workers. This section measures their perceptions of the adequacy and usefulness of modern office equipment, related fears and anxieties, and job satisfaction associated with the trend toward automation.

The fifth and final section, questions 14 through 18, sketch secretaries' notions of when stress is most likely to occur, as well as their awareness of the phenomenon, assessments of its impact on their health and their methods of coping.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

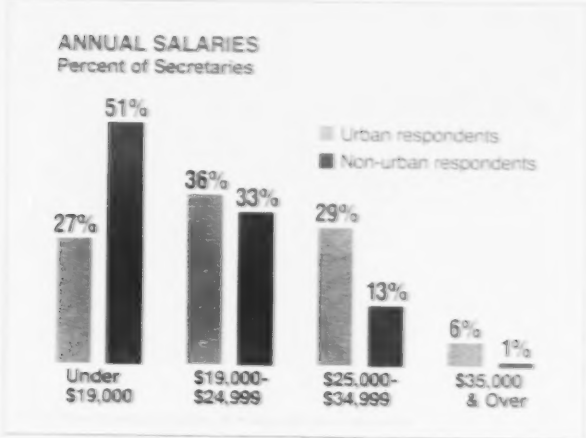
All survey respondents are members of Professional Secretaries International. Most work at large firms. Over a third of them serve at companies with more than a thousand employees. A full seventy percent are employed at firms with 100 or more workers.

Nearly half of the secretaries are aged 30 through 49, while almost that many are 50 and older. Fewer than nine percent are 29 or younger.



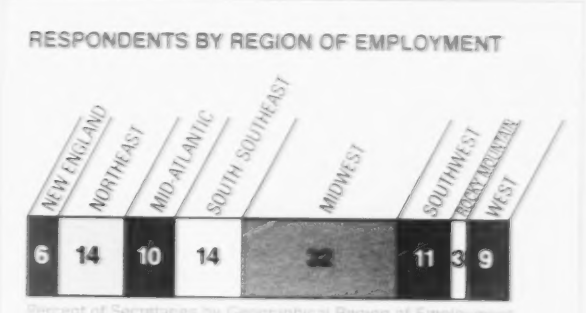
The two most-common job titles the respondents bear are "Executive Secretary" (29%) and "Secretary" (27%). "Administrative Assistant," "Administrative Secretary," and "Office Manager" follow in frequency at eighteen, nine and eight percent, respectively. Nine percent of respondents hold other titles. Highly paid secretaries in the top metropolitan centers usually are titled "Administrative Assistants," while well-paid secretaries in less-urban areas most frequently are called "Executive Secretaries."

Thirty-nine percent of the respondents earn less than $19,000 annually and seventy-five percent earn less than $25,000. Only 3.4 percent make more than $35,000 a year. The high-wage earners are concentrated in urban areas. While nearly six percent of secretaries in major metropolitan areas earn above $35,000, only one percent in the non-urban regions have attained that salary level. Non-urban secretaries are more likely to draw smaller paychecks—more than half of them earn less than $19,000 a year. In metro regions, only about a fourth (27%) fall into that income bracket.



Greater than half of our sample works for only one executive and fewer than a quarter (21.6%) must report to three or more professionals.

The region of the nation most heavily represented in our survey is the Midwest, attributable to the concentration of PSI membership in the area. Respondents from the Northeast and South/Southeast each represent fourteen percent of our pool, followed by the Southwest (11%), Mid-Atlantic (10%), West (9%), New England (6%) and Rocky Mountain (3%) regions.



Percent of Secretaries by Geographical Region of Employment

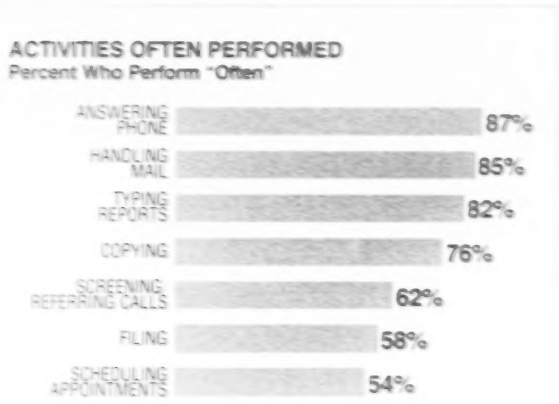
SURVEY FINDINGS

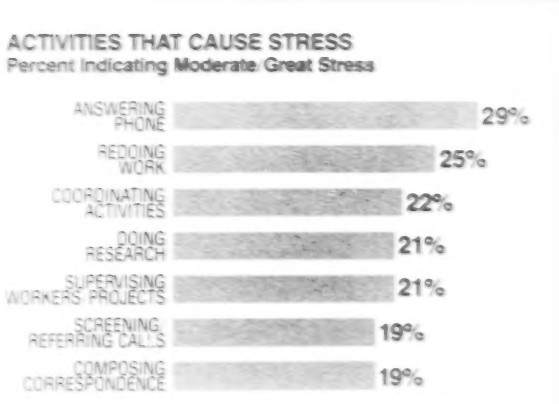
Environmental Factors and Stress

The survey attempted to evaluate the impact of environmental conditions, including activities, relationships and growth prospects, on stress. The results seem to refute the hypothesis that the repetitive nature of activities and characteristics can trigger stress.

Job Activities

In order, the most frequently performed "job activities" are answering the phone (87% say "often"), handling mail (85%), typing reports (82%), copying or duplicating (77%), screening/referring calls (62%), filing (58%) and scheduling appointments (54%).





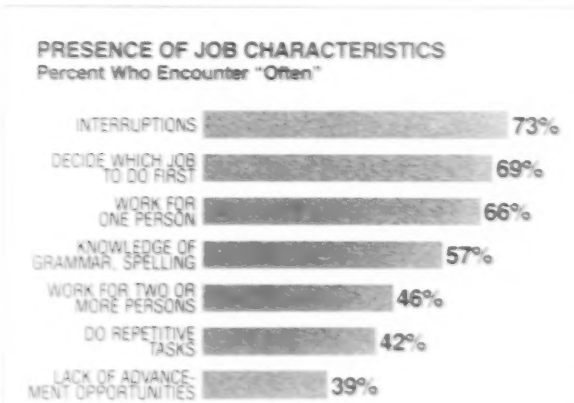
The activities that cause secretaries the greatest stress are answering the phone (29% feel a great or moderate amount of anxiety), redoing work executives did too hastily or erroneously (26%), coordinating activity between or among departments (22%), supervising workers or projects (21%) and doing research or collecting numerical data (21%).

This suggests that stress-related tasks are most likely to (1) be non-routine, (2) be interruptive in nature, (3) require judgement, or (4) involve management or supervisory activity.

Some of the least-stressful tasks indicated by respondents were some of the most frequently experienced, and therefore apt to be more repetitive in nature. These include: handling incoming/outgoing mail (78% claim it causes limited or no stress), making maintenance calls on equipment (75%), making travel arrangements (73%), scheduling appointments and meetings (69%) and duplicating or copying (69%).

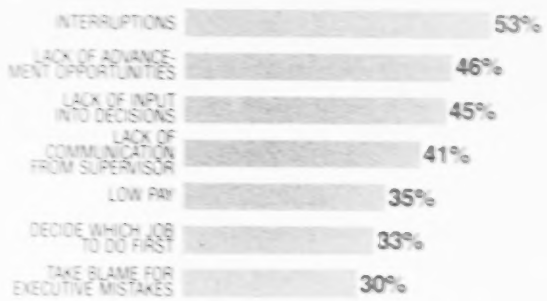
Job Characteristics

The "job characteristics" cited by secretaries as being most frequently present are interruptions (73% report them "often"), deciding which job to perform first (69%), working for one person (66%), knowledge of grammar and spelling (57%), working for two or more persons (46%), doing repetitive tasks (42%), lack of advancement opportunities (39%) and trying to increase productivity (36%).



The characteristics that cause secretaries the greatest stress are interruptions (53% experience "moderate" or greater levels), lack of advancement opportunities (46%), lack of input into decisions (45%), lack of communication from the supervisor (41%), perceptions of insufficient pay (35%), deciding which job of many to perform first (33%), and taking the blame for executive mistakes (30%).

JOB CHARACTERISTICS THAT CAUSE STRESS
Percent Indicating Moderate/Great Stress

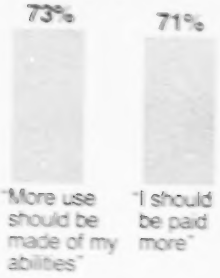


The least-stressful characteristics of the secretaries' jobs are knowledge of grammar, spelling and punctuation (75% experience limited or no stress), concern that new equipment will substantially change their jobs (75%), working for one person (72%), working more independently and with less supervision (66%), using improper equipment (65%) and being given more responsibility than they would like (63%).

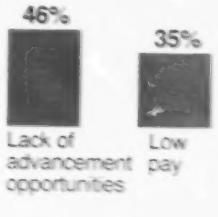
Low Mobility

The survey indicates that secretaries suffer stress due to limited upward mobility within their jobs. Nearly half (46%) of all respondents experience stress triggered by lack of advancement opportunities. Almost three-quarters (73%) agree that more use should be made of their abilities, with younger (29 and under) secretaries concurring more strongly than their more-mature colleagues.

RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNDER-UTILIZATION, LOW PAY...



...LEAD TO STRESS OVER UPWARD MOBILITY, SALARY



Only fourteen percent of all secretaries feel that heightened responsibility is a stress-producing characteristic, while the idea of greater independence and less supervision causes anxiety among only ten percent. More than a quarter (28%) of all secretaries suffer stress from the boredom of routine, unchallenging tasks.

Predictably, seventy percent of the respondents perceive that they should be paid more money. The lower-paid and younger secretaries most strongly feel this anxiety. Fifteen percent say that they are receiving adequate compensation.

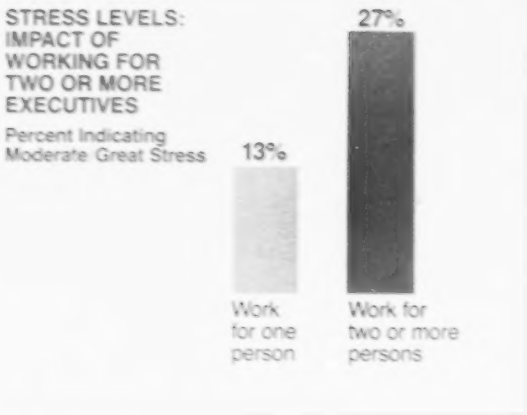
More than one-third of the overall respondents (35%) suffer stress they attribute to low pay, about one-half of the ones under age 29. Secretaries in non-urban areas are more likely to complain of low pay, particularly those under age 29.

Professional Relationships

Generally, the secretaries have good relationships with their supervisors. Eighty-six percent agree that their executive is satisfied with their level of work output. Higher-paid employees feel this confidence more strongly than those receiving lower salaries.

Yet, forty-five percent agree that they should have a better executive/secretary team. And, a full fifty-three percent feel that there should be better communication concerning work priorities. Lack of communication is the fourth-most stressful characteristic cited by secretaries.

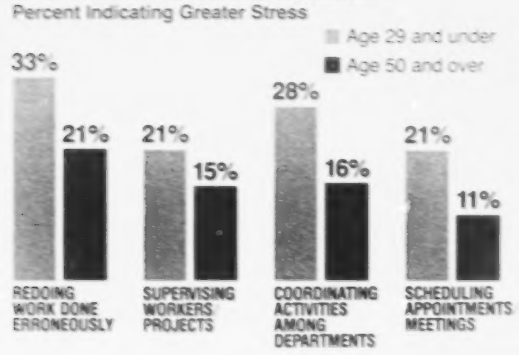
Handling the conflicting priorities of many executives is of particular concern to the respondents. Twice as many feel stress working for two or more executives as the ones who serve a single professional. Further, thirty-three percent claim that deciding which job to do first causes stress.


STRESS LEVELS: IMPACT OF WORKING FOR TWO OR MORE EXECUTIVES
Percent Indicating Moderate Great Stress
13%
27%
Work for one person
Work for two or more persons

Age Differences

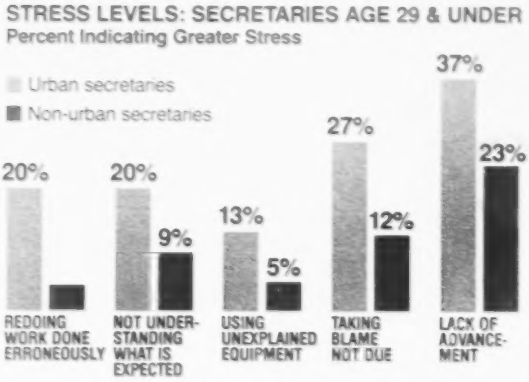
Overall, younger secretaries (29 and under) are more likely than their more-mature counterparts (over 30) to check the survey box marked "great extent of stress." Younger workers feel stress more acutely in several areas, including:

- redoing work that the executive did too hastily or erroneously
- deciding which job to do first
- working weekends
- interruptions
- low pay
- lack of input into decisions that affect them
- poor working relationships
- doing repetitive tasks



Urban/Non-Urban Differences

Urban secretaries generally express only slightly greater stress than ones in non-urban areas. But among younger secretaries, urban employees indicate much greater levels of stress. In fact, younger urban secretaries are the most stressed group in our survey: They are about twice as likely as the young, non-urban respondents to say they often must redo work done erroneously or hastily, and to often supervise workers and projects.

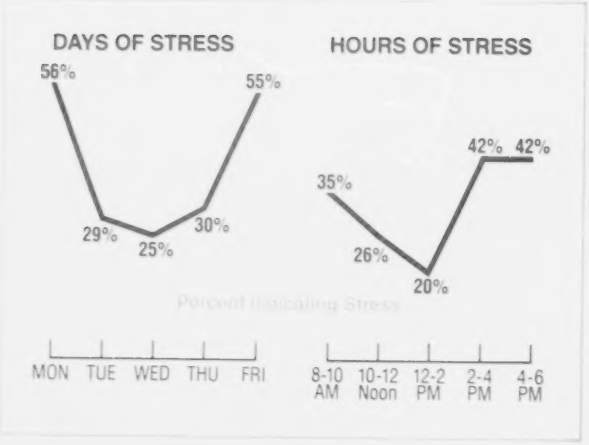


Younger secretaries from non-urban areas complain more frequently of:

- low pay
- doing repetitive tasks
- poor working relationships with colleagues
- doing duplicating or copying

Stress Levels by Day/Time

Monday is, overall, the most stressful day of the week (56% feel some stress), followed by Friday (55%). Tuesday and Thursday elicit stress among twenty-nine percent and thirty percent, respectively. Wednesday, the traditional day of moderation, is the calmest day of the working week for most secretaries (only 25% feel stress). Younger secretaries are more likely to feel a greater degree of stress *every* day than their more-mature co-workers. During the average day, great stress is most likely to occur between 4 and 6 o'clock.

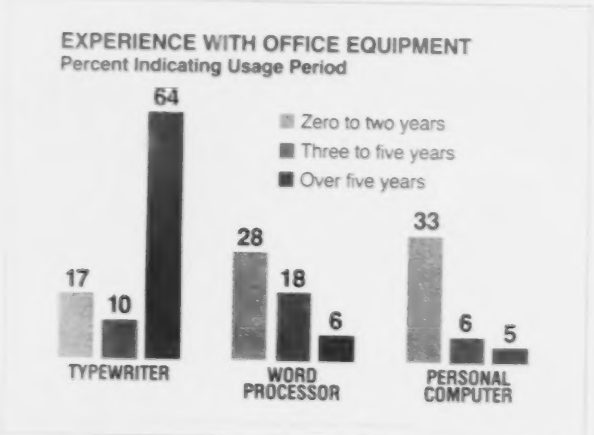


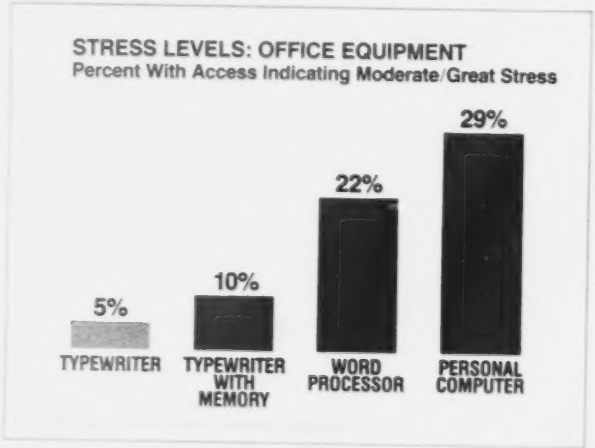
Impact of Office Equipment on Stress

Equipment Use Patterns

The automated office is a recent development. As a result, the respondents have limited experience with modern office machinery, particularly personal computers. Fewer than ten percent of those surveyed have been using a PC for more than three years. Half still don't have access to a word processor or PC, while only forty percent use an electronic typewriter with or without memory; little more than a fourth employ a work station with mainframe access. Differences in use patterns between secretaries in urban and non-urban areas are small.

Stress associated with office machines, while generally low, increases among respondents with the rising level of technological sophistication. It comes as no surprise that the typewriter, with which seventy-four percent have been working for three years or more, elicits stress among only four percent of the polled secretaries. After the conventional electric and electronic typewriters without memory, the amount of stress perceived by respondents who actually use the particular machines progressively increases: Ten percent with access to an electronic typewriter with memory feel moderate or greater stress in



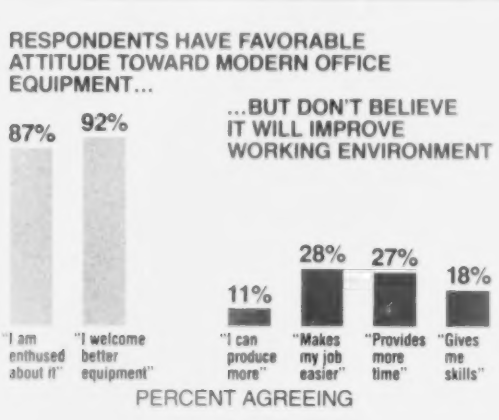


operating it; this compares to twenty-two percent with a word processor among those who use them, and twenty-nine percent with a personal computer.

General Attitudes Toward Equipment

Overall, the respondents displayed a favorable attitude toward modern office equipment despite their lack of experience with more-sophisticated products. Most secretaries (87%) are enthusiastic about automated office machines and nearly all (92%) welcome new and better products. Fewer than five percent of our respondents feel threatened by modern office equipment.

Secretaries in urban areas are less suspicious of modern office equipment, particularly the younger ones: Ninety-three percent of the younger, urban group harbor no suspicion, compared to only eighty-one percent of the non-urban younger secretaries. Overall, seventy percent of urban secretaries claim no suspicion, while only slightly more than half (53%) of their non-urban counterparts are completely at ease with the concept.



Young urban secretaries are nearly unanimous in their favorable attitude toward modern office equipment. More than ninety-six percent of them agree that they are enthusiastic about such equipment, and *none* are unenthusiastic.

While the respondents' overall attitude toward office automation is positive, the majority, surprisingly, disagree that it has improved their work environment. Even though they have limited experience with many of the machines, nearly three-quarters (72%) of all respondents disagree—only eleven percent agree—that modern office equipment has made them more productive. Twenty-seven percent feel that modern office equipment makes their jobs easier. Younger secretaries are more likely to feel that automated machines have made their job easier than are more-mature ones.

Most secretaries do not feel that automation will provide them with greater time for more challenging or responsible activities (26% do); more-mature ones are particularly pessimistic about these prospects.

Even fewer secretaries (20%) feel that "superior quality is expected due to modern office equipment." Thirty-three percent believe that modern equipment leads executives to expect more work to be generated; the young are more likely to feel these heightened pressures.

Significantly, only eighteen percent of the respondents feel that office automation can give them skills to move up the career ladder. Younger secretaries hold out greater hope for advancement through such skills than do their more-mature colleagues.

Further, more than half of the secretaries believe that current automated equipment is satisfactory for their needs. Overall, forty-five percent feel the office should have *more* of the machines. Lower-paid and younger workers, in particular, want to see more automation.

Generally, higher-paid workers feel less threatened by automation than do their lower-salaried counterparts. Urban secretaries are twice as concerned as non-urban ones that new equipment will substantially change their jobs (2.2% vs. 1.0%).

Most secretarial workers feel eminently competent to handle the newest equipment: Only 8.9 percent feel that office equipment is changing too rapidly for them to adapt. More than half of them, however, agree that learning about the use of new equipment in the office should be made easier.

In fact, the most stressful job characteristic linked to modern office machinery is that it is not sufficiently explained—twenty-six percent experience stress when confronted with such a situation. Machine downtime produces stress among twenty-five percent of the respondents, while sharing a computer, printer or word processor evokes stress in eighteen percent.

More than seventeen percent feel anxiety when forced to use improper equipment.

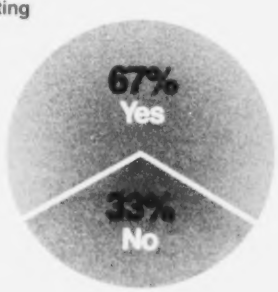
Respondents are about evenly split (38% vs. 43%) over whether executives should have a better understanding of how modern office equipment works. More than one-third (43%) of the respondents agree they should not have to share computers, printers or word processors, although fewer (18%) experience stress when they actually are expected to share.

Awareness of Stress

The survey's respondents showed a surprisingly high stress awareness level. Two-thirds claim that stress has affected their health. Urban secretaries report no greater impact of stress on health than ones in non-urban areas. Younger secretaries are somewhat more likely to feel that stress has affected their health.

HAS STRESS AFFECTED YOUR HEALTH?

Percent Indicating Stress' Effect On Health



According to the results, lower-paid secretaries experience the physical symptoms of stress more frequently: Sixty-nine percent of secretaries earning below $19,000 claim to feel such effects, compared to only forty-four percent making $35,000 a year.

Interestingly, more than two-thirds (68%) have attended seminars in which they were taught techniques to minimize stress and tension.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

Beyond the basic statistical breakdown of tabulated responses to specific questions, the survey findings indicate several important themes. The analysis by Dr. Robert Chell and Dr. Robert Ostermann, industrial psychologists at Fairleigh Dickinson University, outlines some of these themes in the context of the relevant survey data.

Environmental Conditions: Under-Utilized And Isolated

Two conclusions strongly indicated by the survey findings are that secretaries perceive themselves as being both under-utilized and isolated. An astounding seventy-three percent of the overall respondents believe that more use should be made of their abilities.

Under-utilization and isolation contribute to stress because they deprive secretaries of four basic needs: the ability to *control* their own work flow; opportunities for *personal growth;* a sufficient level of *communication;* and availability of *resources*, such as modern office equipment. Our analysis focuses on these areas:

Control

Secretaries generally wield little control over their own work load. As mentioned, two-thirds of the respondents (68%) at least sometimes lack input into decisions that affect them, a situation that causes stress in almost half of them (45%). Not only do they lack control, but more than a third (39%) at least sometimes take blame for mistakes made above them, contributing to their feeling of helplessness.

The ability to control the flow of work is most conspicuously absent when secretaries report to a number of executives. This situation makes work priorities unclear and leaves critical decisions in the hands of an often under-informed secretary, resulting in stress. In fact, twice as many respondents, twenty-seven percent, feel stress when working for two or more executives as those reporting to only one person (13%).

Similarly, redoing work that executives have done sloppily or incorrectly, the second-most stressful job task, leads to loss of control as secretaries stretch their responsibilities farther than their awareness of the subject, or its priority, generally extends.

Answering the phone, the task that causes the most stress (29% feel moderate or greater stress), incites the condition mainly because it interrupts secretaries' work flow and provides an element of uncertainty—they don't know who is on the other end of the line and what work the call might create.

Personal Growth

The survey shows that seventy percent of all secretaries sometimes feel locked out of advancement opportunities. Nearly half say these feelings cause stress.

Further, fear of responsibility is not what contributes to stress: Only ten percent imagine that greater independence and less supervision might cause anxiety; only fourteen percent experience stress when given more responsibility than they would like.

Communication

Secretaries believe that a lack of communication is a major cause of stress. Many respondents feel isolated from their executives. In fact, seventy percent experience a lack of communication from their supervisor and almost as many (68%) believe that they have little input into the decisions affecting them. Further, thirty-eight percent complain that, at least sometimes, they don't know what's expected of them on the job. Nearly half agree that they are inadequately informed on their firms' overall objectives, as well as the goals of their own work.

In addition, secretaries frequently are denied access to important facts and, as a result, must consult executives too often. This situation diminishes their ability to control work flow since supervisors may be unavailable on a regular basis.

The communication problem is especially acute when a secretary must report to two or more executives. As mentioned, twice as many respondents experience stress in this situation.

Resources

Generally, secretaries feel that current office equipment is sufficient to do their job competently, and aren't intimidated by it. Twenty-eight percent, however, feel that it is unsatisfactory for their needs. Fewer than nine percent believe office equipment is changing too quickly for them to adapt. A greater concern is that they have consistent and immediate access to their

machines: They don't want to share because they must relinquish control of their work flow.

Four to five times as many secretaries are given electric typewriters or electronic-memory typewriters for individual use as are forced to share such equipment. PCs and word processors more frequently are apportioned for general use, limiting secretaries' on-demand access, which results in stress.

Attitudes Toward Office Equipment

The respondents indicated an interesting dichotomy in their attitude toward modern office equipment. While almost all, ninety-two percent, welcome new and better equipment, and eighty-seven percent are enthusiastic, the majority don't believe that it will substantially improve their working conditions.

For instance, only eleven percent agree that modern equipment makes them more productive, twenty-eight percent that it makes their jobs easier, eighteen percent that it enhances their chances for promotion, and twenty percent that it heightens the quality of their work.

Unlike many executives, secretaries apparently do not see newer and more powerful office equipment as a "panacea" for making their jobs easier and more rewarding. Fifty-nine percent feel that current office machinery is sufficient for their needs; the balance do not, including five percent who believe that they often are forced to use improper equipment.

Secretaries are confident that they cannot be supplanted by a machine. Only six percent expressed fear that automation will substantially change their jobs. This concern is, in fact, the job characteristic that respondents most often labelled "not at all stressful." Apparently, today's secretaries see modern office equipment more as part of their jobs than as a contender for them.

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents express confidence that they can adapt to new, evolving office machines, which, in general, cause some of the lowest stress rates in the survey. The greatest stress associated with machinery are those aspects that lower the user's control—such as sharing equipment, poorly explained machines, dealing with downtime, and more-complicated products, such as word processors and PCs.

Yet, most secretaries have little experience with sophisticated office equipment. While more than seventy-four percent have three years or more experience with office typewriters, only twenty-four percent have worked with a word processor that long, and only eleven percent have that much experience with a PC. This data can be explained by the fact that much of the equipment has entered the office *within* the last five years.

Secretaries are most comfortable with typewriters—both electric and electronic. Personal computers, once thought to be a crucial link in the office information flow, incite stress among seven times as many secretaries as do typewriters. Since most do not feel that modern office equipment, such as PCs, will substantially improve their productivity or work quality, the stress they experience using them may point out that such machines aren't the proper tools for most secretarial tasks. One area in which a PC could help, however, is in providing access to important information that could be used to make decisions.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

The results make the point clear that stress is a real concern among secretaries. In reality, secretarial stress harms the entire office. It contributes to a lack of productivity, which delays vital projects. And, while everyone would like to reduce it, methods of doing so aren't always easy to find.

Dr. Ostermann and Dr. Cheil have some suggestions on how to keep stress in check. Posed as real-life concerns, these ideas are by no means the only answers, but may serve as starting points toward minimizing the level of stress on secretaries, and the managers whose careers depend on them.

Secretary's Complaint:
"My boss just dumps work on my desk. I do projects I only half-understand, and being unsure of whether I'm doing it right or not really ties my stomach in knots."

Suggestion:
Executives should explain their personal goals and the goals of the company. Secretaries should seek to understand their supervisors' place in making the office work. This should help them choose which projects to do first and how much time to spend on them. If executives complain that they don't have the time to explain their concerns, they should be reminded of the time they'll save by not having to heavily edit the work or do it over.

Manager's Complaint:
"My secretary will sometimes spend hours on a project I wanted to take only minutes. And, when I finally get the work, it's so far off the mark that I end up doing it over myself."

Suggestion:
Executives should remember that secretaries are probably much less familiar with a project than they are. They should explain the task more fully to the secretary than they would describe it to themselves, and avoid nebulous terms like "a handful of figures" or "all competitors with high sales" in instructions. Finally, they should quickly outline the *usefulness* of a task; when secretaries understand the goals of the company, their work is more likely to be on target.

Secretary's Complaint:
"I never know where my supervisor is or when he's due back. If someone phones for him, I have to guess what to tell the caller. It makes me sound stupid."

Suggestion:
Secretaries should let their supervisor know they're concerned, and when their oversight disturbs phoning clients. Then, every time executives leave the office, they should ask them if they're going out. This way, executives will be more likely to remember to leave word about where they'll be.

Manager's Complaint:
"Every time I ask my secretary to type up a working draft or a dictated memo, so that I can re-work it, I get a dirty look. Sometimes I start all over and throw out the first draft. But, until I see a complex idea on paper I can't really refine it. Besides, that's the nature of the secretary's job."

Suggestion:
Executives should make certain they're not using the secretary's work as a "time-delay" while organizing their thoughts. If the work they're having done is reasonably useful and organized, and the secretary still grimaces, the issue should be discussed. The two parties may have different conceptions of what the job is about.

Secretary's Complaint:
"I'm bored. All I ever do is type someone else's work. I get involved in projects only after all the creative work has been done."

Suggestion:
All secretaries are free to take the initiative and ask the manager for more responsibility. Supervisors are often unaware of employees' ambitions. Secretaries should ask to do research projects, follow-up phone calls, or coordination with subcontractors. They should also let their supervisor know that they're interested in taking on more challenging tasks in order to improve prospects for advancement.

Manager's Complaint:
"My secretary doesn't seem to care about the quality of work. He rushes through things, knowing he's doing an inadequate job. I'm all wrapped up in the project, why isn't he?"

Suggestion:
Executives should delegate enough responsibility so that all their co-workers—secretaries, junior executives and other support staff—feel they make a contribution to the team. They should allow secretaries to exercise independent judgement in setting up the filing system, selecting office equipment, or perhaps doing some research projects. In being denied creative input and self-determination, better secretaries sometimes exhibit stress as boredom and disinterest.

Secretary's Complaint:
"My executive is very bright and creative, but he's really disorganized. He starts far more projects than he finishes, and he works on them in sporadic bursts. It's exasperating and causes me extra work in the form of reports that go unused and in pulling the same files again and again.

Suggestion:
Secretaries should encourage their executives to perceive the two of them as a team, and should diplomatically point out any unproductive activities. Each team member should try to excel in other members' weak areas (in this instance, organization).

General Complaint:
"I just don't get as much satisfaction out of my job as I'd like. I don't really get to use my talents. Other people make all the decisions, I just follow instructions."

Suggestion:
Secretaries and managers should not expect their jobs to satisfy all emotional needs—they won't. They should balance their lives by cultivating interests outside the workplace, such as a service group, an exercise club or an arts league. They should also get involved with a professional organization.

Involvement in such groups provides an outlet for energies that often are denied at the workplace, and may help reduce stress by meeting emotional needs, such as a sense of belonging, leadership and recognition.

EPILOGUE

We'd like to express our thanks to Carolyn Hayes CPS, president of Professional Secretaries International and her entire staff, to Thomas A. Miller, president of the T.A. Miller Company, and to the team of industrial psychologists from Fairleigh Dickinson University, Dr. Robert F. Ostermann and Dr. Robert M. Chell, for their valuable assistance in developing, conducting and analyzing the survey. The extensive participation of all the project members made it truly a "professional" research program.

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